

November 2020

State Director's Angle **Generate Energy!**

By State Director Michael Leach



How is it November already? It seems like in some ways this calendar year has flown by. Maybe because of the pandemic and the huge hands-on response this agency has provided to our clients and the public at large since March. I know I am constantly amazed by the work our DSS professionals are doing every day and going above and beyond to help children and families in need.

We know there is an immense amount of time and sacrifice that goes into caring for other children, families and adults in all program areas, and in order to do that very difficult job well, we know that our professionals have to feel supported.

One thing that cannot suffer, no matter how hard the task may be before us, is to let our energy level be dependent on those around us. We each need a reminder that we, ourselves, are responsible for the energy we create and bring into a situation.

If you want to be an influential and inspiring leader you need to bring energy to others, rather than wait for others or circumstances to bring energy to you. It is easy to be energized when things are going well. It takes courage and leadership to be energized and to energize others unconditionally.

I hope you will join me and Team DSS in our charge to **Generate Energy** for making South Carolina a place where children and families thrive.



National Adoption Month focuses on older youth in foster care

As National Adoption Month continues, 154 children in the state's foster care system are legally free for adoption and waiting for a permanent place to call home – a "forever family."

All year long, SCDSS works diligently with community partners to find families that best match the unique needs of every child and youth awaiting adoption. November offers the chance to join the USDHHS [Children's Bureau's](#) efforts to increase awareness and bring attention to the need for permanent families for children and youth in foster care. This year's national theme, "[Youth Voices: Why Family Matters](#)," emphasizes the need to secure safe and stable family connections for older youth and teens.

To highlight the significance of the month, Gov. Henry McMaster issued a proclamation declaring November as Adoption Month.

"There are currently 154 young people in foster care in South Carolina who are in need of permanent families," said Governor Henry McMaster. "A loving home can make all the difference to a child's ability to tap into his or her greatest potential. South Carolinians are a caring and compassionate people who want the best for their neighbors, and I ask that everyone consider whether adoption is a possibility for your family."

"Every child deserves the chance to grow up in a home where they feel safe, loved and protected and many waiting children in our system are ready to benefit from adoption," DSS State Director Michael Leach said. "It's a fact that fewer families adopt sibling groups and older youth and teens, who linger in foster care and are most likely to age out of the system without the support and safety net they need to flourish as young adults. This is our greatest need. As an agency, we want to change that and help youth secure stable connections to become independent, productive adults through permanency. Our society as a whole benefits when that happens."

“The pandemic has not stopped our work to help children and families,’ Leach said. “I urge families to consider the joy an older youth can add to your life and the chance you have to make a life-changing difference in theirs.”

Learn more about becoming a forever family for a young person through adoption. Visit [SCDSS Adoptions](#) online and view profiles of SC's waiting children by visiting the [SC Heart Gallery](#).

Congratulations...

Antonio and Deborah McCall
of Dorchester County
for being selected
**Lowcountry Regional Adoptions 2020
Family of the Year!**

The McCalls have 18 children, 12 of whom were adopted! Dorchester County Sheriff's deputies, firefighters and the Summerville mayor helped celebrate the McCall family by participating in a local parade organized to honor the family.

Many thanks to local sponsors...

ABC Trophies and Awards; Bonefish Grill; Carolina's Lowcountry Cuisine; Chick-Fil-A, Rivers Avenue/West Ashley; Edible Arrangements, Goose Creek; Lowe's, Publix, Tractor Supply and Signs ASAP of Summerville.



Used Car Donations Help Deserving Foster Youth

On the Road Again, a project of the South Carolina Foster Parent Association, provides donated cars to foster care youth who are at least 18 and not yet 21 years old, actively employed, pursuing a GED or engaged in a post-high school educational program. With adequate transportation, these young people are able pursue their goals of continuing education and employment, allowing for a more successful transition into adulthood. Click [here](#) to learn more.

Number of Cars given away **242** as of 11/12/2020



Thriving Families Update: Transforming South Carolina's Approach to Child Welfare

(Excerpts from article published in the Children's Bureau Express, Vol. 21, No. 7)

The concept is simple. South Carolina can keep families together and children out of the child welfare system if it makes sure the state's families have the resources, skills, and abilities to provide nurturing home environments.

The reality, however, is more complex, and it will require innovative shifts in how South Carolina approaches child welfare. The focus must be on a preventative system that boosts family well-being and supportive communities rather than one that is reactive to individual cases of trauma and violence.

South Carolina is one of four jurisdictions participating in Thriving Families, Safer Children: A National Commitment to Well-Being, a national program to redesign child welfare. The program is being developed by the U.S. Children's Bureau, Casey Family Programs, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Prevent Child Abuse America to create more just and equitable systems to break harmful multigenerational cycles of trauma and poverty to benefit all children and families.

It takes all of us working together to prevent child abuse, and this project puts those words into action.

The success of families and children is dependent upon nurturing environments. For South Carolina to make this transformation to a more proactive approach, it must increase the protective factors around families and ensure resources are available within communities and that those resources are truly accessible to families regardless of race or socioeconomic status. It will incorporate a holistic view of child development and family well-being, while preventing child maltreatment and unnecessary family separation.

To continue reading the article, please [click here](#).

Daniel's Law: South Carolina's Safe Option for Surrendering an Infant

The Safe Haven for Abandoned Babies Act, known as Daniel's Law in South Carolina, provides a safe option for surrendering an unwanted infant. Daniel's Law is named for an infant boy who survived after being buried in a landfill soon after his birth. Nurses named him Daniel as he recovered at a hospital. Daniel's Law was enacted to prevent these kinds of dangerous and often fatal abandonments.



Under the law, instead of abandoning a baby up to sixty days old in dangerous circumstances, a person can surrender their unharmed newborn baby at a designated location. They can give their child a chance at a happy, healthy life with a loving family.

For more information about the Safe Haven Act, or Daniel's Law, please click [here](#). For a listing of crisis pregnancy organizations see the [brochure](#).



Child Support Program Marks Biggest Year of Collections

*By Tim Mose, Director
Child Support Services Division*

In terms of putting money into the hands of households who need it, the Child Support program has quietly had its **biggest year of collections to date**, bringing in \$343,591,274 during the federal fiscal year. This is a **13% increase from last year's record**, which was particularly noteworthy because it was the program's first full year operating under the new **Palmetto Automated Child Support System (PACSS)**. Although some of our administrative enforcement remedies have been suspended or relaxed during COVID-19, tax offset and garnishments have remained in place, with unemployment garnishments still at 13 times their level in March of 2020.

The coming year holds promise for both our customers and staff. At the local level, throughout all four office locations, the mail room will be centralized and scanned. All documents will be coming in to the Harden Street facility in Columbia, where our Central and Midlands Regional Offices are located. This will improve flexibility already evident in the staff's ability to do their work remotely.

Customers will also see **virtual customer service kiosks**. Currently being piloted in our Lowcountry Regional Office, these kiosks will allow virtual face-to-face problem-solving contact with staff, who will be on-site, albeit in a different room.

And, just as exciting, from the comfort of home or anywhere there's a capable device, customers can use a **new, secure online Child Support Customer Service Portal** to view payment information,

hearing dates, enforcement measures in place, and receive occasional announcements. Parents will also be able to update addresses, phone numbers, employment and other contact information as well as send inquiries to Child Support customer service staff. The portal will go live early in 2021.

“Leap Years” Campaign Helping to Build Lifelong Foundation for Children

*By Michele Bowers, Director,
Division of Early Care & Education*



During the first five years of life, a child will experience extraordinary developmental transformations. This period is often called “the leap years.” That’s because not only does a child grow by leaps and bounds, but also because a child’s ever-changing brain is continually evolving- literally leaping forward with learning, developing, absorbing and building a foundation for how they will learn for the rest of their life. These changes are also challenging to parents.

That’s where DSS’ ABC Quality comes in. From the importance of outdoor play to getting enough sleep and even finding the best child care program, ABC Quality’s Leap Years campaign helps parents make the decisions that will ensure a successful future for their children. We encourage parents to watch videos on our blog that break down seemingly complex questions into simple, easy to understand terms. View two of our videos [here](#) and [here](#).



ADVISORY for PARENTS and CAREGIVERS of children learning at home...

The SC Department of Social Services must grant approval for temporary child care operations designed to support children during school-time care, e-learning care, virtual learning, and/or extended school time care due to schools not providing in-classroom instruction. [Learn more or apply for a temporary certificate to operate a school-age child care facility during the COVID-19 Pandemic.](#)

ABC Quality: Child Care Heroes Campaign

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, child care programs have ensured that families across South Carolina have a healthy, safe, reliable and quality environment to send their children while working to keep our economy thriving. ABC Quality



has created the Child Care Heroes Campaign to recognize ABC Quality child care educators who nurture overall child well-being and support families during the pandemic.

Submit the name of your Child Care Hero to:

Sherrie Dueno at sherrie.dueno@dss.sc.gov or 864-238-7972.

If you would like to join the ABC Quality Family call toll free at 800-763-2223 or email abcquality@dss.sc.gov.



Did you know...

South Carolina has 900,000 residents age 65 and older, which is 18% of the state's entire population. Almost 75,000 of these senior adults live in poverty.

[Click here to visit our website to learn more about Adult Protective Services](#)

Vulnerable Adults: Protection. Respect. Independence.

By Rick Knight, Director of Administration, Adult Protective Services

SCDSS Adult Protective Services (APS) is mandated by state law to protect vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect, and exploitation by investigating and providing temporary assistance until risk is minimized and services are secured.

APS provides intervention and protection for vulnerable adults who cannot provide care or protection for themselves in a manner that ensures attention will be given to the adult's right to self-determination, lifestyle and culture. These services must be provided in the least restrictive environment as determined by the adult's level of care and safety.

What's new in APS?

- In late July, APS started a staffing program with Medicaid (administered by the SC Department of Health and Human Services) to speed up the application approval process for APS clients. APS is starting to see positive results from these staffings and anticipates even greater results.
- APS revised its Pre-Screening Tool to better align with the program's legal mandate and to have a better balance between safety and the adult's autonomy. In conjunction with that

revision, APS has developed a very clear and concise video training for APS professionals about the APS Pre-Screening process that will be released soon.

- For the fourth consecutive year, APS was awarded a Victim of Crime Assistance (VOCA) grant in September. This grant started on October 1, and it funds five APS Intake Practitioners, a Victim Advocate, a Family Engagement Services Coordinator, and the APS Family Group Conferencing Project. Over the four years of the grant, the Family Group Conferencing Project has grown from 20 conferences in Beaufort County to 40 conferences in 13 counties (Aiken, Allendale, Berkeley, Beaufort, Calhoun, Charleston, Colleton, Dorchester, Hampton, Jasper, Lexington, Orangeburg, and Richland).

Look for more exciting initiatives from APS in the coming months.



Food Assistance during the COVID-19 Crisis

In response to the pandemic, DSS has actively worked to maintain critical operations and preserve public assistance benefits for eligible individuals and families across South Carolina. DSS has received approval from the USDA to provide emergency SNAP supplements from March through November and hopes to receive approval to issue emergency benefits in December to address food needs for SNAP households. This

emergency SNAP supplement will bring all households up to the maximum benefit amount, based on household size, regardless of income. SNAP households who already receive the maximum benefit amount will not receive an emergency supplement. Learn more information about SNAP benefits or apply [here](#).



November 2020 Employee Of The Month



SCDSS Employees of the Month

Seven DSS professionals will be recognized by Director Michael Leach as November Employees of the Month.

Recognized for their hard work and leading with *Competence, Courage and Compassion* for the month of November are (left-right, top row): **Susan Stroman**, Staff Development & Training, Columbia; **Jonathan Dusenbury**, Internal Audit Division, Columbia; **Natasha Benjamin**, Child Welfare Services, Lexington; (left-right, bottom row) **Kathy Lennox**, Child Support Services, Greenville; **Taylor McJunkin**, Adult Protective Services, Greenville; **Kevin Irick**, Economic Services, Hampton; and **Jaime Kearns**, Paralegal, Pee Dee Region (not pictured).

Normally, the honorees would join Director Leach for an in person lunch in Columbia, but with the ongoing pandemic, this recognition meeting on November 20

with the Director will be virtual. Each will still have the use of a designated parking space for the entire month. They will also all receive a DSS lapel pin, a gift card for purchasing their lunch during the virtual luncheon and an announcement sent to their local newspaper. Congratulations all!

SCDSS Partners Salute Excellence in Child Welfare Services



Foster Parent Association Recognizes DSS Social Worker of the Month

The South Carolina Foster Parent Association (SCFPA) recognizes **Tiara Walker** as **November Social Worker of the Month** for her outstanding service to children and families in the Midlands Adoptions office! Congratulations, Tiara!

The SCFPA partners with SCDSS to recruit, train and support the state's foster parents.

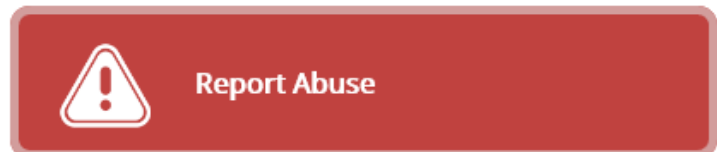
Alston Wilkes recognizes 2020 Case Manager Professional of the Year

Jewel Campbell, a Dorchester County DSS foster care manager, has been named the **2020 Case Manager Professional of the Year** by the [Alston Wilkes Society](#). The organization honors professionals and volunteers from the children's services, law enforcement, criminal justice and veteran's fields. Jewel is seen by her peers as an outstanding worker who "exemplifies the guiding principles and standards of SCDSS... takes accountability and command of her foster care cases by going above and beyond to meet the needs of the children and families." Congratulations, Jewel! The Alston Wilkes Society's 58th Annual Meeting and Awards Virtual Presentation will be held on Thursday, November 19 at noon.



SCDSS Launches New Online Portal for Abuse and Neglect Reporting

This week, SCDSS unveiled a new web portal to allow the public to make online referrals of suspected abuse and neglect of a child or vulnerable adult. Reporters may elect to make an anonymous referral or provide contact information to receive follow up on the disposition of their referral. The portal is accessible from several links on the agency's website and augments other methods of abuse and neglect reporting, including the agency's 24-hour, toll-free hotline: 1-888-CARE4US (1-888-227-3487).



Report abuse and neglect
of children and vulnerable adults.

 **DSS**
SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT of SOCIAL SERVICES

1-888-CARE4US



Happy Thanksgiving!

SC Department of Social Services
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